

“I began making surrealist collages in 1986 after being significantly impressed and inspired by those of a friend. The only “advice” I received was to: 1) accumulate a morgue, and 2) start with one fragment of paper and begin adding other fragments to it. My first collages consisted of either poster-sized ‘doll houses’ (three sets of two rooms stacked on top of each other), or single magazine pages cut out in their entirety and used as a background onto which I glued figures and objects. Eventually I began to experiment with techniques for making my collages more cohesive, as well as more original. I was able to make the ‘doll house rooms’ blend into each other by covering their edges with flowing or transitional objects, and I also discovered that if I could find at least two large fragments (or groups of fragments) with complementary imagery, I could use one fragment for foreground and the other for background. These techniques paved the way for my medium-sized pieces, which were both less “choppy” and more original.

By the late 1980’s, I had figured out how to make a fairly cohesive collage landscape, but although many of my pieces looked interesting and revealed a certain amount of archetypal symbolism, they did not have the kind of personal emotional energy found in the best works of surrealism. This early work was closer to fantasy art – a genre more suggestive of escape than of reflection.

This changed in 1994. As a result of a difficult personal loss in 1990, the emergence of more personal themes can be seen, and the varying treatments and degrees of these themes reflected the various ways I attempted to come to terms with them. By the late 1990’s, my work shifted toward themes of relationship conflict, which gradually evolved into more complex themes involving simultaneous conflict and harmony with the physical body, man and his fellow man, and man and his environment.

As I look back over fifteen years’ worth of work, it is possible to see both compositional and emotional elements informing each other as the work takes its shape over time. I think I gravitated to collage because I sensed that the collage process was a significant metaphor for my life. Placing the interesting, strange, painful, or beautiful things I find in positions where all of the pieces magically come together to form a rich, evocative, and intriguing pattern helps me to believe more strongly in an underlying unity amidst the frequent chaos and disconnectedness of human life. Stated another way, collage is a way of taping into the distinctive patterns that my own emotional energy creates in the world.”

Melanie Reed